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SELECTION OF PEOPLE FOR WORK

Organizations spend a tremendous amount of time, money, and energy trying to recruit and select a qualified, capable, and productive workforce. The aim of selection is to choose the best possible person for the job and to do this without any unfair discrimination against certain groups of applicants.

Organisations continue to compete with one another for the most skilled and productive employees. More and more, companies are realising the importance of developing comprehensive programs for employee recruitment, screening, testing and selection. Depending on the job level, the cost of recruiting, selecting, training, and then releasing a single employee can range from a few thousand dollars to several hundreds of the thousands of dollars (Wanous, 1992).

The basic goal of selection from the employer's point of view is to select the most effective person for the job. Usually selectors take into account the applicant likelihood of staying with the organisation and their potential to move into higher level posts, making further contributions to the development and effectiveness of the organisation.

In setting up a selection process employers consider what a person needs to demonstrate in order to be considered as the best person for the job. This involves setting out a person specification which traditionally includes a list of knowledge, skills and attitudes/abilities (KSAs) that would be central to good job performance. Though the emphasis of selection thinking tends to be on the appointment of new applicants into vacant posts, selection in fact covers a number of procedures for staff changes and organisational development.

On a sombre note, selection may also be required for redundancy and for early retirement. In this topic we shall first consider techniques of screening applicants for posts. In a sense this means passing them through the filter of the person specification to see how well they match up. Psychologists have developed various psychometric tests which are instruments which attempt to measure characteristics of people - personality, ability, intelligence and so on. We shall consider the use of these in selection.

We shall then move on to looking at the most common assessment instrument in selection-the face-to-face interview-and look at possible problems with this procedure. We will end by looking at some of the decisions which selection panels make in finally selecting an applicant for a job.

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PERSONNEL SCREENING AND PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING

Selection is the final stage of the overall recruitment process and it is concerned with choosing from a sample of job applicants the individual is best suited to the jobs available. An earlier stage is the activity of recruitment which is concerned with attracting a pool of candidates (using advertisements, agencies, etc) for the vacant position, as well as producing a short list of candidates whose background and potential are in accordance with the profile contained in the job specification, referred to later. Selection is normally used to decide who shall enter the organisation, and it can be contrasted with the placement process, which involves matching people already in the organisation to the available jobs.

Personal screening involves the investigation information about job applicants' to KSAs in order to make a satisfactory appointment. From the slightest point of view, this includes likely productivity efficiency and tenure (length of stay in the post).

Any recruitment program is to avoid intentional or unintentional discrimination against underrepresented groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, the elderly, and the disabled. Employment discrimination against any of the above groups, intentional or unintentional, is illegal.

We need now to consider several ways of assessing what each applicant can do and how they are likely to perform in future. Below is a list of assessment methods used to screen applicants.

- Review of
  - CV (curriculum vitae) - includes past experience and achievements
  - Academic Qualifications
  - Application Form - includes current demographic details (where living at present, current post, salary, responsibilities, reasons for wanting to post)
  - Letter Of Application-also includes current post information but should be tailored specifically to the job description saying why candidate is particularly suited
  - References
- Psychometric Test (abilities and personality)
- Face-To-Face Interview
- Work Sample (performance of actual task which are critical to the job)
- Assessment Centre (involves a variety of the above procedure).

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CV (CURRICULUM VITAE) & APPLICATION FORM:

The first step in the screening process involves the evaluation of written materials such as Application Forms and CVs. Usually, standard application forms are used for screening lower-level positions, with CVs used to provide biographical data and other background information for higher-level jobs, although many companies require all applicants to complete an application form. The main aim of the application form and CV is to collect biographical data such as education, work-experience, and outstanding work or school accomplishments. Such data are believed to be amongst the best predictors of future job performance (Feldman & Kich, 1991; Krouse, 1994;Owens, 1976).

However it is often difficult to assess constructs such as work experience in order to use it in employee screening and selection. Researchers have suggested that work experience can be measured in both quantitative (example, time in a position; number of times performing a task) and qualitative (example, level of complexity or challenge in a job) terms (Quinones, Ford & Teachout, 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998).

It is important to also mention, however, that first impressions play a big role in selection decisions. Because written materials are usually the first contact a potential employer has with a job candidate, the impression of an applicant's credentials received from a resume or application are very important. In fact, research has shown that impressions of qualifications from written applications influenced impressions of applicants in their subsequent interviews (Macan & Dipboye, 1994).

Most companies use a standard application form, and the information collected must be job related. Questions that may lead to discrimination such as inquiries about age, ethnic background, religious affiliation, marital status or finances should not be included.

The person's name can also lead to bias. A Daily Mail newspaper report, (Vasagar, 1999), cited the case of Mr. Tahir Hussein who was awarded £16,500 following a successful complaint of race and sex discrimination against a recruitment agency.

evaluation

Preliminary screening is usually according to negative criteria. People are screened out because they have the wrong qualifications for the job, no previous experience or other justifiable reasons.

The main problems in evaluating application forms is judging the balance e.g. difficulty to choose between someone with little education but much experience as opposed to someone with good education but no experience.

An attempt to quantify the information obtained from application forms has led to the development of *weighted application forms* which assign different weights to each bit of information on the form. The weights are determined through detailed research on the relationship between this biodata and criteria for success on the job. Research has shown that the information that most consistently predicts job success usually deals with level of education and prior work experience (Lawrence, Salsburg, Dawson & Fasman, 1982).

evaluation

It may be possible to assess the applicant's state of current knowledge from the letter and CV ... But it may not. It all depends upon what the applicant has been asked to do and whether they have provided what has been requested.

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SAMPLE CV

John Murphy

21 Sharman Street
Limerick City

Tel: 061 63930
Email: jsfowler@bt.com

An Environmental Science graduate with substantial and responsible work experience looking to bring a range of skills and commercial knowledge to a new career in an environmentally related organisation in the private, public or voluntary sector.

Key Skills and Achievements

Business awareness

My ten years in commercial environments taught me how to keep tight financial control, reduce costs, maintain positive relations with suppliers and customers and retain good staff. My last job at Call-a-phone showed me the problems encountered when a small company starts up in a highly competitive industry without adequate capital and administrative systems.

Team working

At Jones and Sons I instituted regular team meetings so that everyone understood each other's roles. I set up systems for covering staff absence and created an induction programme for new staff to help them integrate quickly.

Founder member of a staff society to organise outings and events. As chair of the Parents Association I encouraged everyone to take on a role in order to share out the work, thereby increasing the number of parents joining the committee.

Interpersonal

I am used to working in a highly pressured environment and responding quickly to customer queries or complaints. I organised in-house training courses in 'Customer Relations' and 'Dealing with conflict' to improve relations both internally and externally.

My marketing role at Call-a-phone involved 'cold calling' and I was successful in exceeding targets for the number of potential clients. Fund-raising for the PTA also meant I contacted companies for money and we reached our target two months early.

Communication

I have considerable experience in report writing at work and essay writing at university. I have enjoyed giving seminar presentations and for my project I had to present my feasibility to study to a local authority sub-committee. I was given very positive feedback.

I was student representative for my course in my last two years at university, liaising with academic staff and reporting back to students.

Education

1999 - 2002 **BSc (Hons) Environmental Science 2:1**
University of Limerick
Subjects included: countryside management, rural economy, international environmental law, climate change, waste management.
Final year project: Feasibility study on doorstep recycling scheme in the local borough.

1998 -1999 Mature Student Access Course, University of Limerick

1985 Leaving Certificate, St Ailbe's School, Tipperary

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Work Experience

1996 - 1998	Househusband, taking on full time responsibility for my three children after my wife was promoted to a senior position involving travelling around Ireland. Took on the chair of school Parent's Association and led fund raising drive for school swimming pool.
1994 - 1996	Call-a-phone, Catherine St, Limerick Marketing assistant for newly created mobile phone sales company. Made redundant when company ceased trading.
1986 - 1994	Jones and Sons, Cecil St, Limerick Started as administrative assistant in sales department of large chain of furniture retailers. Promoted to office manager after three years. Responsible for running the office, recruiting and training junior staff, creating and maintaining database of customers.
1985 - 1986	Various temporary posts while taking evening classes in book-keeping.

IT skills

I am up-to-date with Microsoft Office and have extensive experience of databases and accounting packages. I am a regular Internet user.

Interests

Playing squash, swimming with the children, going to veteran car rallies.

References

Available on request.

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SAMPLE JOB APPLICATION FORM

Use this worksheet if you have not developed a résumé.

Name: _____

Present Address: _____

Permanent address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____ Social Security number: _____

Person to contact in an emergency: _____
Phone: _____

OPTIONAL INFORMATION

Date of birth: _____

Height: _____ Weight: _____

Marital status: _____ Maiden name: _____

Number of children: _____ Ages: _____

Child-care arrangements: _____

Driver's License number: _____

Make of car: _____ Year: _____ License no. (car): _____

Job Objective: _____
Date you can start: _____

Desired salary: _____

Other job interests: _____

Willing to relocate? _____
Area preferences: _____

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Education	Name and location of school	Years attended	Degree	Program: major/minor
College				
Highschool				

Other (including conferences, workshops, seminars):

Honors, achievements, extracurricular activities, hobbies, or interests

Employment Record (in reverse chronological order)

Dates of Employment	Names and address of organization	Title or position	Duties and responsiblities	Name of supervisor	Reason for leaving

Professional, union, social memberships

Military Service	Branch of Service	Date of Entrance	Date of Discharge	Rank

Military assignments/Occupational specialty:

Explain any special circumstances:

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Explain any personal responsibilities or health problems that might prevent you from coming to work such as defects in hearing, vision, or speech.

References Name Address Telephone Number Received Permission

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REFERENCES

Along with interviews, references are widely used as a selection method. The results of a survey of the techniques used for managerial selection revealed that although large organizations are increasingly using assessment centre type exercises and biodata, most organizations still select managers on the basis of interviews and references (Robertson & Makin, 1986; Shackleton & Newell, 1994). Normally, employing organizations take up references only when a job offer is imminent, but there are occasions when references are used as a screening device prior to the preparation of the final shortlist of candidates. Generally, the available research evidence does not support the popularity of references as a means of obtaining a third party's opinion of an applicant's credentials and achievements. It is said that bias is almost built into this method because the candidate is likely to nominate a referee who is capable of conveying favorable information and impressions, and a positive recommendation.

ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Assessment centres make use of many different methods, including interviews, psychological test, in-tray exercises, written task, and group discussions. They can last for a few days or a week or alternatively they can be as short as the day.

Assessment centres, first used in selection on a small scale, now appear to be an increasingly popular method of personnel selection. Applicants for a job usually assessed by trained assessors who normally hold fairly responsible positions in the organisation. These assessors observe applicants' performance on the various exercises and arrive at a consensus of opinion about the suitability of each applicant.

There is no doubt that assessment centres are viewed favourably as a selection method. The belief is that a combination of selection methods found in an assessment centre can significantly improve the probability of selecting appropriate applicants, and in particular candidates for managerial positions (Thornton, 1992). Proponent of assessment centres would argue that the data obtained from applicants is comprehensive and comparable, and the methods used give applicants opportunity to demonstrate capabilities unlikely to find expression in an interview alone. In addition, the total experience of the assessment centre is said to be invaluable for the applicant, while for the assessor it is an opportunity to develop skills in the objective assessment of people and in presenting personnel data in a professional way.

Among the issues addressed by critics of assessment centres are that there is a need for substantial investment in resources to create and operate these centres, including the need to select and train suitable people as assessors. Finally, Arnold (1998) acknowledged that assessment centres measure something of importance, but go on to say that there is considerable uncertainty about what they do measure.

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WORK SAMPLE TESTS

Work sample tests require the applicant to perform a task or set of tasks that are considered, following job analysis, to have direct relevance to the job in question. Thus the applicant is requested to demonstrate his or her ability by performing part of the job. The activities involved can be wide ranging (Robertson and Kandola, 1982).

For example, the applicant may be asked to type a letter, or operate a machine, or take decisions similar to those taken in the job in question. This is done through the use of in-tray exercises (a method of testing management potential by asking the candidate to deal with a set of problems) with the applicant is presented with a collection of letters, memos, etc., and is asked to deal with them.

When work samples tests are administered to experience applicants, the psychomotor tests (example typing) and the in-tray tests seem to command a superior position. Work Sample test can also be administered to applicants who are not trained in the relevant job. In fact the main purpose of these tests, which can overlap with tests of cognitive ability, is to assess whether or not an applicant is suitable for training. Trainability tests have been developed for many occupational groups with reasonable results (Robertson and Downs, 1989).

Research suggests that work samples can be valuable in predicting future job performance (Jackson et al., 2000; Lance et al., 2000).

Evaluation

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POLYGRAPHY

The lie detector test or polygraph might be considered by some to be particularly appropriate for selecting people for jobs involving the handling of cash. The polygraph is used to measure emotional stress shown by variations in blood pressure, pulse rate, perspiration, and respiration as applicants answer questions. The reasoning is that telling a lie is stressful, and the stress will be reflected in physiological reactions. But it should be kept firmly in mind that the polygraph measures emotional stress and is not a measure of learning. Many causes of emotional stress not related to lying may cause a person to fail a lie detector test. Also, many people can live without being detected by a polygraph (Hall 1986).

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING

Psychometric tests are any standardized procedure for measuring sensitivity/memory/intelligence/aptitude/personality. Psychometric tests are rarely used in the selection of professionals such as lecturers or doctors. They have been more extensively used where jobs are relatively focused and specific in range, such as lathe operator, clerk, a technician or pilot.

Test formats, or the ways in which tests are administered, can vary greatly. Several distinctions are important when categorising employment has.

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS GROUP TEST - individual tests are administered to only one person at a time. In individual tests, the test administrator is usually more involved than in group test. Group tests are designed to be given simultaneously to more than one person, with the administrator usually serving as only a test monitor. The obvious advantage to group test is the reduced cost for administrator's time.

SPEED VERSUS POWER TESTS - Speed tests have a fixed time limit. An important focus of a speed test is the number of items completed in the time period provided. A Power test allows the test taker sufficient time to complete all items. Typically, Power test have difficult items, with a focus on the percentage of items answered correctly.

PAPER AND PENCIL VERSUS PERFORMANCE TEST - ~~speed power~~ and pencil tests required some form of written reply, either in a forest paper or open ended, "essay" format. Performance test, such as typing test and test of manual dexterity or grip strength, usually involve the manipulation of physical objects.

Test tend to fall into one of two major categories, **ability test** where we are interested in the best people can do, sometimes known as' maximum performance', and **personality test** where we are interested in what people are generally like-and their typical performance.

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ABILITY AND APTITUDE TESTS ((ognitic tests)

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Ability test measure what a person can do. They are sometimes known as attainment or achievement tests, thus putting the emphasis on what you have already achieved. **Aptitude tests** are aimed at assessing what you want potentially capable of. The term aptitude is often used in the sense of innate (in-born) potential where as the term ability refers more to what a person has learned to do (Kline, 1993).

Cognitive Ability Tests range from tests of general intellectual ability to tests of specific cognitive skills. One criticism of using general intelligence tests for employee selection is that they measure cognitive abilities that are *too* general to be effective predictors of specific job-related cognitive skills. However, research indicates that such tests are, in fact, reasonably good predictors of job performance (Marrett & Depinet, 1991; Gotfredson, 1986; Hunter & Hunter, 1984). In fact, it has been argued that general intelligence is the most consistent predictor of performance across all types and categories of jobs (Schmidt & Ones, 1992; Thorndike, 1986).

evaluation

Historically there has been a reluctance on the part of employers to use general intelligence tests for screening job applicants because there is some evidence that scores on some tests may favour the economically and educationally advantaged and might discriminate against certain ethnic minorities.

evaluation

PSYCHOMOTOR TESTS: These include, for instance, hand eye coordination task and any which include specialised equipment, such as completing a maze or using a driving simulator.

GENERAL ABILITY TESTS: these look at broader categories of human psychological functioning such as general intelligence and the so-called' major growth factors' of verbal ability, special abilities, and numerical abilities.

TEST OF SPECIFIC ABILITY: this is a very broad area of testing and there is a grey area between these and the broader general abilities just mentioned. An example would be the following tests included in the MOST (modern occupational skills tests) battery:

- Verbal Checking
- Numerical Checking
- Technical Checking
- Decision Making
- Filing

JOB SKILLS AND JOB KNOWLEDGE TESTS: Various tests measure specific skills and knowledge. For clerical workers these could include tests of typing, proof-reading, alphabetical filing, correcting spelling and grammar and using a word processor. A special sort of job skill test involves the use of work samples which measure the applicant's abilities to perform brief samples of some of the critical tasks that the job requires. An obvious advantage is that of being directly job-related. A drawback of this method is that it is expensive to develop and administer.

→ evaluation

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PERSONALITY TESTS

Measures of personality and motivation are concerned with what a person is like. Many tests have been developed from 'grand' theories of personality in psychology where researchers have tried to identify and measure relatively stable characteristics of individuals. The Myers Briggs test, for instance, relies heavily on Jung's psychoanalytic concepts.

A wider variety has been used to attempt to match characteristics of job applicants with those of successful workers. In the 1960s and 1970s there was much controversy about their use because research at that time showed little connection between general personality dimensions and performance of specific tasks. However, more recent research has indicated that certain work-related personality characteristics can be quite good predictors of job performance, particularly when there is a thorough analysis of the job requirements (Robertson & Kinder, 1993; Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991).

evaluation

PERSONALITY SCALES attempt to measure how a person generally is and behaves, the typical approach to life, people, events. Common personality traits or types measured by tests include: anxiety, aggression, extroversion, introversion, self esteem, aggression, dependency, leadership style and a whole range of attitudes.

PERSONAL INTEREST in entries measure a person's interests in life in particular their interest in different types of occupation, their orientation towards people or things and so on. They would be of particular use in careers and occupational guidance, or in guidance for training and personal development.

MOTIVATION SKILLS concern people's drive and desire especially in the world of work and their chosen job. Examples would be measures of 'need for achievement' and 'job satisfaction'.

Since there is a great deal of conflict between the various theoretical models of human personality, the use of personality tests in personnel selection can be controversial. It would be highly discriminatory to use measures on a theoretical concept, such as extroversion or dependency for which there is nowhere near universal agreement, in order to bar one person from a job and accept another. By contrast, the use of ability test is far less controversial because they generally possess greater validity and reliability. Agreement on the validity of personality test (what they actually measure) is much harder to achieve than for ability test.

→ evaluation

Employers however tend to be more interested in personality than in ability Bartram et al (1995) surveyed some 498 small UK businesses and found that selectors placed far more emphasis on the applicants' personality (example honesty, integrity) and interest in the job than they did on ability, aptitude and attainment.

Practice varies across national boundaries with regard to the enthusiasm for and the acceptance of test (Arnold, 1998). For example, Italy does not allow test to be used in selection. Two countries Sweden and the Netherlands gives applicants the right to see their test results before the employer sees them, and the applicants can, if necessary, withdraw the application and destroy the results.

↓

evaluation (cultural differences)

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BENEFITS, USEFULNESS AND LIMITATION OF TESTS

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The effectiveness of using standardized tests for screening potential employees remains a controversial issue. Critics cite the low validity coefficients (approx. 0.20) of certain employment tests. However, supporters believe that a comparison of all screening methods – tests, biographical data and hiring interviews – across the full spectrum of jobs reveals that employment tests are the best predictors of job performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984). Obviously, the ability of tests to predict performance in a specific job depends on how well it can capture and measure the particular skills, knowledge or abilities.

The use of test can:

- Improve the fairness of the selection procedure
- Improve the means for providing equality of opportunity
- Increase productivity by selecting the most efficient employees
- Lower costs of training by selecting those who are better suited to the job
- Lower costs of recruitment by selecting those who are more likely to enjoy the job and stay in it
- Improve relations among the workforce as the result of an impression of fair selection methods
- Increase efficiency through effective deployment of staff

The fact that tests discriminate is not a problem but should be a strength. After all, what we want them to do is to discriminate unfairly between potentially good and weaker employees, in the sense that the good ones are best suited to the job. However, where tests discriminate unfairly against groups or categories of people the problem can be legal as well as moral. Psychometric test may unintentionally discriminate unfairly against certain groups. This was certainly true in the early days of testing when general intelligent test in the USA, used to screen newly arrived immigrants, included questions about sports stars and characters in advertisements. The general language used in test is likely to be more familiar to some than to others, in terms of ethnicity and social class.

In order to be measures that we can trust, psychological tests need to be both reliable and valid. Reliability refers to the test being consistent while validity refers to the tests measuring what it is supposed to measure. A very important issue relating to the use of tests is that of validity generalization which refers to its ability to predict job performance in a setting different from the one in which it was validated. High validity generalization will increase its usefulness. Many Organisational Psychologists argue that the validity generalization of most standardized tests is high, while at the other extreme, some feel that the ability to predict future job success is situation-specific and the validity should be established for each instrument used by a company.

- evaluation

Ability tests do better on these criteria than to personality test but no test is perfect. Psychological test results alone will not give an employer a rounded picture of the person they are proposing to employ, why that person really wants the job, their history of absenteeism, their punctuality and inability to keep to deadlines. Most important of all they will not tell the selector what the person is like face-to-face and they will not provide information on how the person actually performs on a task.

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Test utility is a further issue relating to the effectiveness of tests. This is the value of a screening test in determining important outcomes such as money gained through its use. This relates to the effectiveness of a test in identifying new applicants who have the needed skills to increase productivity and profits for a company. For example, in one company, a valid screening test was used to select applicants for 600 jobs as computer programmers (Schmidt, Hunter, McKenzie & Muldrow, 1979). The estimated money gained in one year from the increased speed and efficiency of the chosen workers was more than $97 million. The initial cost of the screening tests was only $10 per applicant, a very good return on investment. All in all, utility analyses of standardized personnel testing programs indicate that such tests are usually *cost effective*.

A final issue concerning testing is the issue of faking. Faking is trying to beat the test by distorting responses to the test in an effort to present oneself in a positive, socially desirable way. Faking is a particular concern for personality and integrity test (Ryan & Sackett, 1987). Laypersons tend to believe that employment tests are easily faked, but this is not the case: first, many tests have subscales designed to determine if the test taker is trying to fake the test. Second, it is often difficult for the test taker to determine exactly which response are the correct (desired) responses.

The most effective use of screening tests occurs when a number of instruments are used in combination to predict effective job performance. Employment screening tests are usually grouped into a test battery. Scores are used in combination to help select the best candidate for the job (Ackerman & Kanfer, 1993).

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TYPES AND PITFALLS OF SELECTION INTERVIEWS

Interviewing candidates for a job remains the most popular method of selection, with numerous surveys showing that almost all UK organizations use it. Yet up to the mid- 1980s most experts would have said that interviews are a very poor method of selection because interview performance does not predict later job performance. Interviewers were shown to be biased in a number of ways. They may place too much weight on negative information, be influenced by a variety of irrelevant factors such as the age, race, gender or attractiveness of the candidate; and they tend to make up their minds too fast (in the first 4 minutes according to Springbett, 1958). After the interview they are very poor at remembering and integrating information when making final decisions.

The label "selection interview" is used to refer to a range of techniques, each of which can be conducted more of less proficiently. An interview involving an untrained interviewer asking a few haphazard and unplanned questions in a noisy environment amidst constant interruption is indeed a waste of time. Unstructured interviews in the hands of well-meaning but untrained people who don't know what they're looking for give rise to all those problems of bias and irrelevance. This type of interview was (and still is) all too common and was the focus of the earlier research hence the bad press.

However, research has now established that 'structured interviews, conducted by trained interviewers using systematic assessment procedures to target key skills and attributes identified by job analysis are [. . comparable to the best selection methods' (Boyle, 1997).

Highly structured interviews can be artificial, inflexible and can hinder the establishment of rapport. Dipboye (1997) gives six main reasons why organizations prefer to use unstructured interviews, including that it is easier to "sell" the job to good candidates, a wider range of questions can be asked. However unstructured but carefully planned and sensitively handled interviews can be good predictors of future job performance – somewhat better than personality tests.

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TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews can be of three main types, all of which have their advantages and limitations.

- Biographical interview
- Situational interview
- Competency-based interviews

The biographical interview is a semi-structured exploration of the candidate's past experiences. This is probably what most candidates expect but it can be difficult to relate the information to job relevant criteria, which means that the interviewer's personal biases are more likely to influence decisions.

In a situational interview questions are based on hypothetical job-related situations and supervisors of people actually doing the job agree on the sort of answers one would expect from 'good', 'average' and 'poor' workers. Cook (1998) gives the following example:

Your partner and two teenage children are sick in bed with colds. There are no friends or relatives available to look in on them. Your shift starts in 3 hours. What would you do in this situation?

Though situational interviews predict future work performance quite well, some authors claim that they are more likely verbal reasoning tests than exchanges of information and could be particularly susceptible to social desirability effects.

Da Silva (1979) has shown that this requires a high degree of cognitive development. Some questions in situational interview question (for example the above one) could be seen as offensive- or even illegal if it was asked only of women candidates, or in interviews for jobs dominated by female workers. The basic principles underlying the construction of situational interviews still apply to better questions, but this example highlights the additional dangers of asking questions that may violate equal opportunities legislation.

Competency-based interviews involve questions relating to important job behaviours,

Describe a time in any job you've held when you were faced with problems and pressures that tested your ability to cope. What did you do?

Such questions make it easy for the interviewer to relate information from the candidate's answers to the skills needed for the job but again the interview has become more of an oral test of intelligence.

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Evaluation of interviews:

However, it is generally agreed that the main function of the interview is not really to assess ability. Instead, interviews serve an essentially social function. Organizations regard a face-to-face meeting with potential employees as important because they want to assess the candidate's degree of fit with the organization and its culture, or within a team. Despite the common criticism that interviews favor people of similar to themselves, selecting a person "one can work with" may be as vital as technical ability to do the job.

There is evidence that interviewers can accurately assess the characteristics such as social and communicational skills and work motivation even through they sometimes base their judgments on the wrong cues. Herriot (1989) argued that the entire selection procedure is a series of social exchanges and mutual negotiation between employer and applicant, each of which involves the implicit or explicit communication of expectations. At any stage in this process either party can terminate the relationship.

Recent research has focused on what happens in interviews and how the characteristics of the participants involved can affect the process. For instance, Graves and Powell (1996) looked at the effects of same- or opposite- sex pairs of interviewer or interviewee. They found that the male interviewers did not show any systematic gender bias when rating the performance of men and women. However, female interviewers rated women candidates higher than the men.

There is racial bias in interviews in a moot question. Anderson (1997) argues against trying to eliminate racist bias in interviewers. Rather, he says that if the interview is racially biased, it is likely that this merely reflects racist vales of organizations. The problem is, of course, that when the majority of interviewers are white and male, the "like-me" bias can add up to serious discrimination, unless concerted effort is made to avoid it.

The reliability of interviewer judgments is also problematic. Different interviewers may arrive at completely different evaluations of the same applicant, even when evaluating the same interview (Arvey & Campion, 1982). Also, because of nervousness, fatigue, or some other reason, the same applicant might not perform as well in one interview as in another, which further contributes to low reliability.

In general, the hiring interview may fail to predict job success accurately because of a mismatch between the selection instrument and the information it obtains, and the requirements of most jobs. Receiving a positive evaluation in an interview is related to applicants' abilities to present themselves in a positive manner and to carry on a one-on-one conversation (Delery & Ferris, 1992).

If the selection interview is going to be fair and effective it needs to be seen for what it is: another tool of human measurement. However it is likely that many interviewers to not see the interviews this way. Below is a list of pitfalls in interviewing that can contribute to making this process one of the most unfair, and in effective methods of selecting personnel:

- Interview questions not standard and likelihood of drifting during any one session, therefore not covering essential areas which are covered for other applicants.

- Questions unfair as not all related to the job and some find these easier than others (example tell us about your hobbies)

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- Interviewers in a panel to not assess on identical characteristics but just have a free for all discussion after all has been seen. Hence comparisons are arbitrary.

- Untrained interviewers, and those with serious prejudices, may base the decision on dislike of the person rather than on job related criteria

In other words, evaluations of the interviewer may be strongly affected by their level of communication or social skills. Therefore, for some jobs, such as those that involve primarily technical skills, performance in the interview is in no way related to performance on the job, because the types of skills required to do well in the interview are not the same as those required in the job.

PERSONNEL SELECTION DECISION

Employee selection is the actual process of choosing people for employment from a pool of applicants. In employee selection, all of the information gained from screening procedures, such as application forms, resumes, test scores and hiring interview evaluations, is combined in some manner to make actual selection decisions.

Once employers have gathered information about job applicants, they can combine that information in various ways to make selection decisions. Based on experience and beliefs about which types of information are more or less important, a decision is made. Although some good selection may be made by experienced decision makers, subjective, clinical decisions are error-prone and often inaccurate (Meehl, 1954).

STATISTICAL MODELS:

One statistical approach to personnel decision making is the MULTIPLE REGRESSION MODEL, an extension of the correlation coefficient. This model is an employee selection method that combines separate predictors of job success in a statistical procedure. Typically this approach combines the various predictors in an additive linear fashion. In employee selection, this means that the ability of each of the predictors to predict job performance can be added together.

The multiple regression model is a compensatory type of model, which means that high scores on one predictor can compensate for low scores on another. This is both a strength and a weakness of the model. For example, an applicant's lack of previous job-related experience can be compensated for by test scores that show great potential for mastering the job.

A second type of a selection strategy, one that is not compensatory, is the MULTIPLE CUTOFF MODEL, which uses a minimum cutoff score on each of the predictors to be hired. An applicant must obtain a score above the cutoff on each of the predictors to be hired. Scoring below the cutoff on any one predictor automatically disqualifies the applicant, regardless of the scores on the other screen variables.

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The main advantage of the multiple cutoff strategy is that it insures that all eligible applicants have some minimal amount of ability on dimensions that are believed to be predictive of job success. They are most commonly used in public sector organizations that give employment tests to large numbers of applicants (Sulzer, 1996). Particular care must be taken by organizational psychologists to set cutoff scores that distinguish the best candidates for jobs, but cutoffs that do not unfairly discriminate against members of certain ethnic minority groups, women or older workers (Barrett, 1988).

The multiple regression and multiple cutoff methods can be used in combination. If this is done, applicants would be eligible for hire only if their regression scores are high and if they are above the cutoff score on each of the predictor dimensions. Of course using both strategies at the same time greatly restricts the number of eligible applicants, so they are used together only when the pool of applicants is very large.

Another type of selection decision making method is the multiple hurdle model. This strategy uses an ordered sequence of screening devices. At each stage in the sequence, a decision is made either to reject an applicant or to allow the applicant to proceed to next stage.

One advantage of the multiple hurdle strategy is that unqualified persons do not have to go through the entire evaluation program before they are rejected. Also, because evaluation takes place at many times on many levels, the employer can be quite confident that the applicants who are selected do indeed have the potential to be successful on the job. Because multiple hurdle program is expensive and time-consuming, they are usually only used for jobs that are central to the operation of the organization.

Assignment # 1

Read the passage below and answer the questions which follow.

The handshake is everything

According to Professor Frank Bernieri it doesn't matter how smartly you dress or how impressive your job application form. Your chances of success at a job interview depend on how you perform in the first 15 seconds. Apparently the handshake is everything!

(a) Describe what psychologists have discovered about the selection of people for work. [8]

(b) Evaluate what psychologists have discovered about the selection of people for work. [10]

(c) Giving reasons for your answer, suggest how you, as personnel officer, would ensure the selection interview was fair for all candidates. [6]